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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HILLAH 000147

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SUBJECT: IRAQI GENERAL OFFERS UPBEAT ASSESSMENT OF IMPROVED SECURITY  
SITUATION IN DIWANIYAH

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CLASSIFIED BY: Angus T. Simmons, PRT Team Leader,  
REO Al Hillah, Department of State. REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Iraqi general offers reasonably upbeat assessment on the improving security climate, despite recent violence in the wake of a concentrated sweep through a JAM-controlled area of Diwaniyah City. Local population appears to support increased efforts to rid the area of Jaish al-Mahdi (JAM) militia influence. Relations between the Iraqi army, coalition forces, and local police are excellent. Provincial Governor remains prickly and difficult to work with. Iraqi and coalition forces continue to work with local tribes to prevent rural areas from becoming sanctuaries for JAM. The local judiciary is unable to uphold the rule of law because of militia pressure.

¶2. (C) On November 1, PRT Team Leader and PRToffs and Hillah RSO traveled to Diwaniyah for discussions with Major-General Farhood Uthman, Eighth Iraqi Army Division (8th IAD) Commander, as well as Major-General Tadeusz Buk, MDN CS commander, and Diwaniyah Police Chief Brigadier-General Safa Kadum Jassim. Uthman's command extends over Qadasiyah, Najaf, Karbala, Wasit, and Babil provinces. PRToffs travelled to Camp Echo from Al Hillah to Diwaniyah by road for the first time in about a year. End Summary.

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General Security Situation  
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¶3. (C) Uthman offered a reasonably upbeat assessment of the improving security climate around Diwaniyah. Coalition forces launched a major operation against JAM to establish control over the eastern part of the city, which had been heavily infiltrated and had become a JAM stronghold. Uthman believes that the militias have lost support with the public who have grown tired of recent violence levels and the lack of public services.

¶4. (C) The Governor and provincial council (with whom he and coalition forces do not have a warm relationship) also support his efforts against the militias, Uthman theorizes, because they want to see the JAM weakened before the next elections. Although the Governor and PC had to some extent found the militias politically useful, security had become so tenuous that even the Governor and the provincial council chair felt personally threatened.

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Cooperation with Local Tribes  
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¶5. (C) When asked about his security plan, Uthman noted that he will soon be reinforced temporarily by an additional

battalion of Iraqi troops in Diwaniyah. In another three to four months he hopes another battalion will replace it to permanently reinforce the 8th IAD troops based in Diwaniyah (next to Camp Echo). Uthman then expects experienced Iraqi soldiers to fight the JAM in the rural areas.

¶6. (C) With the dispersal of militia elements to the countryside after the recent coalition offensive from eastern Diwaniyah City, Uthman (Uthman is himself a tribal sheik) communicates regularly with tribal leaders to help prevent JAM members from establishing a safe haven in rural areas. Uthman said that tribal leaders have agreed, based largely on having worked cooperatively with him in the past on issues of mutual interest, not to shelter criminals. Uthman strongly supports the work of the Agricultural Union distributing seeds and fertilizer through the tribally organized agricultural union. When asked by Team Leader why the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agriculture DG in particular did not want to work with the agricultural union, the general noted that the Agricultural DG was a JAM member. Uthman's stance in support of trying to get support to the rural tribes has brought him into conflict with Governor, who he views as having a very narrow political agenda of acting only in support of his Badr Corps/SCIRI party interests rather than the province as a whole. Friction with the Governor does not appear to bother Uthman, who appears to believe that his professionalism has won him unshakeable support from Baghdad.

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Views on Local Judicial System  
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¶7. (C) When asked whether he has confidence in the local judicial system to uphold the rule of law, Uthman said that the judiciary's qualifications are good but that "delivery" is bad due to militia coercion. Although Uthman works closely with the Diwaniyah Police Chief, he believes that approximately 50 percent of the police force is infiltrated by

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JAM elements. Note: Separately, Police Chief Jassim also remains skeptical about the judiciary, noting that the "past history is bad." Jassim also remarked that he believes 50% of his force is infiltrated by JAM. End Note.

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Comment and Biographic Note  
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¶8. (C) During our meeting, Uthman was confident, relaxed, and optimistic. A native Diwaniyahn and long-time military officer, he is knowledgeable and astute about local conditions. As a military officer, he believes he has "a moral duty and the legal ground" (and the strong backing of the central government, including the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense), to go after any criminal, particularly those affiliated with militias. He is plain speaking, and (strictly protect) did not hold back in his criticism of JAM and Moqtada Al-Sadr. He is a key coalition partner committed to the long-term success of a stable and secure Central South area but believes he needs more material and a better local police force capable of maintaining security in Diwaniyah. He speaks good English, but has never visited the United States. End Comment.

SIMMONS